



# **Strategy**

## **2019- 2024**

As of 17 June 2019

## INTRODUCTION

Child Rights Coalition Asia's 2019-2024 Strategy represents our five-year journey to contribute to the advancement of the rights of the child. It reflects our commitments, thematic priorities, and approaches in working together and moving forward as a civil society coalition driving positive change for and with children.

CRC Asia has been an active player in upholding child rights in the region since our formation in 2008 and formal registration as a non-stock non-profit organization in 2012. Taking advantage of being a regional coalition, we coordinate advocacy efforts to give strength to our calls, utilize our diversity to broaden perspectives and capacities, and provide space for children and civil society in difficult environments.

This 2019-2024 Strategy was developed by taking into consideration the gaps and emerging issues on the realization of child rights, the strengths and expertise we have developed so far, the challenges and areas for improvement we have identified, and other internal and external factors impacting our work.

**Child Rights Coalition Asia (CRC Asia) is a regional network of child rights organizations working together to be a strong voice for child rights in the region.**

**Our 2019-2024 Strategy has the following elements:**

- 1. Our Vision** – The purpose of our coalition and the ambition that brings us together
- 2. Our Targets** – The priority results that we seek to contribute to and that drive the design of our programs
- 3. Making It Happen** – Our strategies and approaches that will guide our work to achieve our targets over the next five years

# Child Rights Coalition Asia

## Strategy 2019-2024

### OUR VISION

All children living in dignity by fully enjoying and exercising their rights

### OUR TARGETS

Improving the systems and policies for children to claim their rights

#### CHILD RIGHTS GOVERNANCE

through child rights monitoring, implementation, and public budgeting

Ensuring the strengthened protection of children from all forms of violence

#### CHILD PROTECTION

by addressing underlying causes

Accelerating the enjoyment of the right of the child to be heard

#### CHILD PARTICIPATION

by providing space and support

### MAKING IT HAPPEN

Global

Regional

Local

If there is an enabling environment for civil society and children to participate

If partnerships within civil society and with children are broadened and deepened

If discrimination on the basis of gender, ability, and age are addressed

If civil society have the knowledge and skills to engage and identify the underlying challenges

If opportunities for civil society and child participation are created and utilized

If the marginalized girls, boys, and other children have the knowledge and skills to participate

## OUR EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

During its formation in 2008, CRC Asia was composed of eight member organizations from six countries in Southeast Asia. Ten years later, we have grown to a network of 17 local organizations representing 13 countries and territories. Among the 13, eight are located in Southeast Asia, three in East Asia, and two in South Asia.

CRC Asia's membership expansion consequently broadens the experience and expertise of the coalition. As of 2018, we collectively work on upholding the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), specifically on the following child rights themes: child participation, violence against children, juvenile justice and children's access to justice, commercial sexual exploitation of children, child trafficking, child marriage, reproductive health, child labor, adoption, statelessness, children in street situations, children in emergencies, and children with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

We utilize these diverse capacities and perspectives to strengthen civil society by providing a regional platform for capacity building, information exchange, and network building. We facilitate the cooperation and collaboration not only between and among our members, but also with other child rights organizations, human rights groups, and other stakeholders. With a decade of experience working as a coalition, we have taken the lead and been involved with initiatives that are developed, implemented, and evaluated in a participatory and inclusive process.

In terms of advocacy, we take advantage of our established expertise and credibility at the regional level to open up the space for civil society participation. We create opportunities to improve the links between child rights organizations and the government. For instance, we pushed for an active role of civil society in the implementation and monitoring of the Association of Southeast Asian

### Opening up space for civil society participation Excerpts of Experiences

In 2017, CRC Asia organized an activity between civil society and the Myanmar government officials serving as the country representatives at the regional level. This activity – arguably the country's first to facilitate a dialogue between child rights organizations and government – served as a catalyst for the succeeding collaborations between civil society and government.

In 2018, CRC Asia's continuous engagements at the regional level merited an invitation from the government of the Philippines to send a child representative to the national-level selection process for a regional effort. This served as the first ever opportunity for CRC Asia member working at the grassroots to be part of this regular government-led selection process.

Since 2015, CRC Asia has been providing inputs to the efforts of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>1</sup> See Annex 2 on information about CRC Asia member organizations

Nations (ASEAN) *Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children (RPA EVAC)*, and this meant linking government representatives to ASEAN to child rights organizations working at the local level. In some countries, the introductions we facilitated had resulted to other collaborations outside the implementation of RPA-EVAC (See box on *Opening up space for civil society participation* on the previous page).

At the regional level, particularly in Southeast Asia, our efforts always include the advocacy and practice to uphold and improve the participation of civil society and children. Under the work plan of the *ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC)*, we have successfully influenced the design and implementation of ASEAN's project on child participation and the inclusion of child rights public budgeting as one of the themes. We have been vocal in opening up space for civil society in the implementation of the *ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD)* and the *ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP)*, the first Convention in ASEAN which, unfortunately, was developed without civil society participation.

Our constant engagements with the ASEAN sectoral bodies also impact the process by which ASEAN involves civil society in its work. As an example, our project with the *ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)* can be argued as the first AICHR endeavor – since AICHR's establishment in 2009 – that involved civil society from start to finish. We were involved from the conceptualization stage (2017) to planning and implementation (2018) until follow up actions (2018-2019). Our experience can be used as a precedent to country representatives to AICHR on how government and civil society can collaborate.

At the international level, we strive to bring the Asian perspective to the development, implementation, or monitoring of international human rights instruments. We are part of the working group of child rights organizations that partnered with the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) in developing the *UN CRC General Comment (GC) No. 19 on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights*. We provided space for civil society and children in the region not only to contribute to the drafting of this international instrument, but also to start the discussions among child rights organizations in Asia about taking part in the public budgeting advocacy. During the global launch of GC 19 in 2016, the Chair of the CRC Committee mentioned that the process of the drafting of GC 19 – involving children and civil society and developing popularized and child-friendly versions – set a standard that should be followed by the future general comments. The final version of GC 19 has 17 mentions of the term “civil society.”

As a coalition, we also submitted inputs to the *UN CRC GC No. 20 on the rights of children during adolescence* and we could identify at least three of our inputs that made into the final document. These inputs are about the access to information on reproductive health for girls and boys; holistic strategies, including digital literacy, in the digital environment; and opportunities to complete education for children who left school. In the *UN CRC GC No. 22 and 23 on the rights of children in the context of international migration*, we were informed by a member of the CRC Committee that we were the only one that raised the issue of children left behind by migrant parents, a concern that we believe is more prevalent in Asia than in other regions of the world.

Working in the area of advocacy at the regional level, we face the constant challenge of monitoring the coalition's impact to the people and children on the ground. We will strive to address this by improving our capacity on documenting how our work at the regional level trickles down at the grassroots, as well as by increasing the institutional capacity of our members and partners on this monitoring. We will sustain the effort to be considered as a credible and reliable network of child rights expert in the region, pushing for strategic and innovative approaches to uphold the rights of the child. We will build on our experiences in organizational strengthening to address the gaps and areas of improvement, with the assistance from a growing number of partners.

As a regional organization, we have the opportunity to be the link that bridges the local to the global. Our membership with Child Rights Connect, a global network with a unique working relationship with the CRC Committee, allows us not only to localize international efforts, but also bring inputs and issues from organizations working at the grassroots level to global discussions. With our geographical coverage and diverse expertise, we are seen as a possible Regional Hub of Child Rights Connect. This would allow us to amplify the voices of local child rights organizations in Asia. We are also approached to give recommendations and links when Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council seek help in connecting with child rights organizations in Asia.

Additionally, by being a regional organization, we are in the position to engage and influence regional bodies in Asia, ASEAN and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). We can strive to achieve greater impact by making use of our Consultative Relationship status to the AICHR, our established partnerships with the ACWC and ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD), and our initial engagements with the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC).

## OUR EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

There are a number of factors and trends which can be beneficial or detrimental for us. They could open opportunities for innovative approaches to achieve our targets, or pose risks and challenges to our work. As such, our 2019-2024 Strategy was developed in a way that it is systematic to give us direction towards our intended results, but it is also adaptive to changes without losing sight of the overall targets.

### Children as Rights-Holders

The UN CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty, but this does not imply that all States Party understand children's rights. In Asia, several countries<sup>2</sup> still have reservations and declarations to the articles in the UN CRC. Also, some parents and members of the community, including those in schools and in governments, still view children as "property" and not as rights-holders.<sup>3</sup>

In monitoring the implementation of the UN CRC, civil society organizations (CSOs) can submit alternative reports to the CRC Committee. As a strategy, CSOs are encouraged to submit jointly<sup>4</sup> and this is one of the common reasons for child rights organizations, including the CRC Asia members, to work as a coalition. However, there are instances, like in Indonesia and Malaysia, where the coalitions cease to function once the report has been submitted. As such, follow up actions, including the implementation of the Concluding Observations, which should contribute to the strategic planning of CSOs, is not given enough attention. When the reporting period approaches again, they face difficulty in efficiently writing the alternative report and providing support to the children's report because they have to regroup and revitalize the coalition first. Following up on the Concluding Observations is also a key area for improvement in established coalitions, such as in the Cambodia, Philippines, and Thailand, that is composed of members with different expertise and priorities.

Furthermore, there are still some countries in Asia<sup>5</sup> that cannot submit alternative reports to the CRC Committee without putting their lives in danger of government retaliation. Also, most of child rights organizations and coalitions are focused on preparing the alternative report to the UN CRC and do not have enough capacity to submit contributions to other human rights treaty bodies, such as the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) to report on

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<sup>2</sup> See Annex 3 for more detailed information about reservations of select countries in Asia.

<sup>3</sup> See *Children as Human Rights Defenders - Inputs from Asia-Pacific Child Rights Coalitions and Networks*. Available at [https://www.crcasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/DGD-2018-Submission-Children-as-Human-Rights-Defenders\\_CRC-Asia.pdf](https://www.crcasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/DGD-2018-Submission-Children-as-Human-Rights-Defenders_CRC-Asia.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Child Rights Connect. *The reporting cycle of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: A guide for NGOs and NHRIs*

<sup>5</sup> Name/s of country withheld for security purposes of CRC Asia member organization/s

the situation of girls or *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) to report on the situation of children with disabilities.

### Civil society space

Shrinking space for civil society has been a challenge for child rights defenders in recent years. The space for civil society's participation is largely affected by the national political situation, which currently shows receding progress towards democracy. When adults encounter difficulties in having a voice in political processes, children go through heightened obstacles to have a space in decision-making processes.

According to CIVICUS Monitor,<sup>6</sup> the Asian region has a high number of countries with heavily restricted civic space, which means that civil society does not fully enjoy the fundamental rights to associate, assemble peacefully, and freely express views and opinions. CSOs and activists face a certain level of risk-taking to peacefully advocate or express criticisms on governance. Using a 5-level rating system, CIVICUS analyses whether the civic space of a country is open (highest), narrowed, obstructed, repressed, or closed (lowest). Among the countries where CRC Asia members are present, only Taiwan gets the "open" civic space rating and South Korea is rated as "narrowed." Four countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, and the Philippines) have "obstructed" civic space, indicating that power holders impose legal and practical constraints on civil society. Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Thailand have "repressed" civic space in which civil society's advocacy work is regularly impeded by power holders and their operations are threatened by de-registration and closure. Three countries (Hong Kong/China, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam) are classified as "closed" due to the atmosphere of fear and violence, heavy censorship, and severe punishment of any criticism of the government.

At the regional level, the existence of two human rights mechanisms in ASEAN – the AICHR and ACWC – presents a promising opportunity to an open civic space but this is clouded in actual practice. In 2015, AICHR started an accreditation process for CSOs interested in engaging with the body. CSOs can apply for a Consultative Relationship with AICHR in accordance with the AICHR's engagement guidelines.<sup>7</sup> Although this accreditation process aims to establish a systematic civil society engagement, it can also be viewed as a restriction in the civic space. For instance, during the first round of applications wherein CRC Asia was one of the first five to be given a Consultative Relationship status, eleven CSOs were rejected with reasons that include the AICHR not being able to reach a consensus decision on the application, the applying CSO allegedly "made strong adverse remarks against the

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<sup>6</sup> Civicus. Monitor Tracking Civic Space. Available at <https://monitor.civicus.org/> Retrieved June 2019

<sup>7</sup> Guidelines on the AICHR's relations with civil society organisations. Available at [https://aichr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Guidelines\\_On\\_The\\_AICHRs\\_Relations\\_With\\_CSOs.pdf](https://aichr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Guidelines_On_The_AICHRs_Relations_With_CSOs.pdf)



AICHR, which caused ‘discomfort’ to some ASEAN Member States,” and the applying CSO allegedly made politically adverse remarks against ASEAN Member States.<sup>8</sup>

On a positive note, AICHR has strengthened its relationship with CSOs with Consultative Relationship in the past years.<sup>9</sup> AICHR extended invitations to these CSOs to its activities, providing opportunities for interface and to share inputs and recommendations. However, there are still work to be done on the level of participation that CSOs are given (i.e., participants vs. speakers), on the financial support provided to CSOs to attend these activities, and on the follow up or feedback to CSOs’ inputs and recommendations.

Some AICHR representatives conduct national-level consultations, but this is limited and dependent on the AICHR representatives’ political will. As such, civic space can be affected by the AICHR representative’s own views on CSO participation, as well by the process in which the AICHR representative was selected (e.g. through a selection process with civil society participation, like Indonesia and Malaysia). The level of CSO participation at the national level also varies, with some AICHR representatives inviting comments on the plans or themes they have already personally identified, while others opening calls for project proposals on any theme related to the AICHR mandate. In CRC Asia’s experience though, the timeframe between the call for proposal and deadline of submission is very limited (i.e. five working days).

Similar to the AICHR, only a few countries involve civil society in the selection process of ACWC representatives, but unlike the AICHR, the ACWC does not have a formal process of civil society engagement. As a body, ACWC’s projects and activities may involve CSOs depending on financial considerations and project and activity designs. In this regard, the level of engagement is dependent on the individual views of the ACWC representative who is leading the specific project or activity. There are ACWC representatives who include civil society in its planning, implementation, and evaluation, and there are also those who reach out to CSOs just to seek funding support. As such, CSOs need to have proactive and sustained engagements with the ACWC representatives, especially during turnovers of appointments.

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<sup>8</sup> FORUM-ASIA. (2016) Breaking the silence and unlocking the barriers for human rights protection in ASEAN – A Report on the Performance of the ASEAN Human Rights Mechanisms in 2017, pages 67-68 Available at <https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2016/10/Breaking-The-Silence-AICHR-Performance-Report-2015.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>FORUM-ASIA. (2018). Reasonable doubt, the journey within – A Report on the Performance of the ASEAN Human Rights Mechanisms in 2017 <https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2018/11/ASEAN-Human-Rights-Institution-Performance-Report-2017-Final-2-1.pdf>

## Child Participation and Children as Human Rights Defenders

According to the results of CRC Asia’s survey with children, child participation is one of their top concerns.<sup>10</sup> There are cultures in the Asian region in which children are not allowed to speak out or children usually do not feel safe to talk publicly because prevailing cultural practice encourages them to listen and keep their opinions to themselves. Nonetheless, there is a growing acceptance on the principle of child participation in the region, taking into consideration the shrinking civic space.<sup>11</sup> Both the ACWC and SAIEVAC have committed to uphold the right of the child to be heard as reflected in their workplans and other documents. Yet, there is still a lot to be done to ensure meaningful and inclusive participation of children. One of these is capacitating all the actors and professionals working directly with children to apply child participation in their everyday duties. Another is ensuring the availability and accessibility of child-friendly information, including child-friendly versions of international, regional, and local documents in various Asian languages. Only a handful of UN CRC General Comments have child-friendly versions, let alone locally translated child-friendly versions. CRC Asia published an English child-friendly version of the *ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) and the Elimination of Violence against Children (EVAW)*, but no other ASEAN official document was translated into a child-friendly language.

In relation to this, a discussion on “children as human rights defenders” is developing at the global level. In Asia, stakeholders have yet to understand the importance of and rationale behind the involvement of children in human rights work.<sup>12</sup> As we mentioned in our paper, “Adults must recognize that human rights work come in many forms, especially with the creativity and imagination of children.”<sup>13</sup>

### Children as Human Rights Defenders

Excerpts from the report submitted by CRC Asia to the 2018 Day of General Discussion by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

“The socio-political environment affects the children’s participation as human rights defenders. Children’s empowerment will be restricted and their safety and security will be at risk if adults who speak out against human rights violations could be arrested; if being a human rights defender is seen as an ‘enemy’ of the State; if parents, teachers, and members of the community do not know about their own human rights and the rights of children; and if States refuse to accept that children can form their own independent views. These barriers must be addressed in order to have an effective child rights approach to the situation of children as human rights defenders.”

<sup>10</sup> See Annex 4. Children’s Inputs to CRCA Strategic Plan 2019

<sup>11</sup> See *Children as Human Rights Defenders - Inputs from Asia-Pacific Child Rights Coalitions and Networks*. Available at [https://www.crcasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/DGD-2018-Submission-Children-as-Human-Rights-Defenders\\_CRC-Asia.pdf](https://www.crcasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/DGD-2018-Submission-Children-as-Human-Rights-Defenders_CRC-Asia.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Page 5

Children's participation is affected by the dimensions of gender equality and disability inclusion. The lack of opportunities for women to participate in public forums directly and indirectly illustrates the lack of support to the political participation of girls in Asia.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, girls entering adolescence and transitioning to adulthood withdraw from public sphere to focus on domestic life.<sup>15</sup> Children with disabilities needing adult and medical interventions also face lower opportunities for involvement in decision-making processes.

### Non-interference principle

The two intergovernmental regional bodies in Asia both subscribe to the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of the member states. This principle implies that member states recognize the differences among themselves, but it also indicates that they are restrained from making open criticisms of or constructive engagements with another member state, even if the latter has committed clear human rights and child rights violations. In this regard, civil society needs to be aware of and work around this principle in engaging with the regional bodies.

In Southeast Asia, the ASEAN or its sectoral bodies has not released yet a regional statement on the situation of the Rakhine States in Myanmar or the “war on drugs” in the Philippines, even though these issues have reached the attention of the global community. As a positive development, the AICHR representatives from Malaysia and Indonesia released a joint media statement in 2018 calling on ASEAN to develop a “whole-of ASEAN approach” in effectively addressing the human rights and refugee crises in Rakhine State.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the issuance of a “joint statement” by two out of ten AICHR Representatives instead of an “AICHR statement” reflects a weakness in the regional human rights mechanism.

Another related area of improvement for the regional human rights mechanism is the establishment of a regional complaints mechanism similar to those present in Africa and Europe. Neither SAARC or ASEAN has a judicial complaints mechanism for human rights, much less a mechanism specific to children's rights. Furthermore, among the ASEAN Member States, only Thailand has ratified the *UN CRC Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure*. According to the ASEAN Dialogue co-organized by CRC Asia and AICHR, some of the countries are hesitant to ratify the OPIC without having domestic remedies in place.<sup>17</sup> Countries need to harmonize their laws with the international standards and strengthen judicial and administrative

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<sup>14</sup> Watson, C. et al. (2013). Adolescent girls, capabilities and gender justice: Review of the literature for East Africa, South Asia and South-East Asia Available at <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8280.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Lloyd, C. (2006) 'Schooling and Adolescent Reproductive Behavior in Developing Countries'. Background Paper. New York: Millennium Project.

<sup>16</sup> <https://humanrightsinasean.info/campaign/joint-media-statement-by-associate-prof-dinna-wisnu-and-hr-mr-edmund-bon-tai-soon>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.crcasia.org/asean-dialogue-on-the-un-crc-and-its-related-instruments/>

domestic remedies so that children can submit individual complaints to national human rights institutions or children’s ombudspersons.

### Digital environment

As the global technological advancement moves towards online connectivity, children and young people keep up and engage in an increasing variety and frequency of online activities. On one hand, this is beneficial as children gain access to information, communication, entertainment, and culture, which can aid in their development. On the other hand, this poses risks because it opens new opportunities to perpetuate violence against children.

During the *ASEAN Regional Children’s Consultation on Online Child Protection* in February 2018,<sup>18</sup> children mentioned that the internet is useful because it helps them in their education (e.g. e-books, online tutorials, and emails to communicate with their classmates); it gives them quick access to diverse information; it allows them to communicate through livestreaming, messaging, and video chat; it helps them in monitoring and having information on their health; it can be used for business and entrepreneurship (e.g. online trading and online shopping) and for transportation (e.g. taxi services and food delivery); and it is a source of entertainment. On the other hand, the children also identified disadvantages in using the internet, including cybercrimes (e.g. online predators, sexual exploitation, invasion of privacy, human trafficking, and pornographic content), hoax (e.g. fake news, fake identities, and incomplete information), cyberbullying (e.g. inappropriate words and expressions and attacks on social media), and addictions (e.g. to gadgets, social media, online games, and pornography). In the consultation, the children also identified their recommended online child protection actions for adults, including those the government, regional bodies and organizations, communities, schools, families and friends, and private companies.

Regarding access to internet, there is a wide discrepancy among countries regarding women’s internet access at home, reflecting also the girls’ access to the internet. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, only 4.9%, 6.2%, and 8.4% of females aged 15 years and older, respectively, reported having access to internet at home, while the percentage are higher in Brunei Darussalam (90.0%), Singapore (83.7%), and Malaysia (78.2%).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Annex 5. Summary of Children’s Recommendations presented during the ASEAN Regional Children’s Consultation on Online Child Protection

<sup>19</sup> [https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=1251&series=gwp2\\_n\\_1](https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=1251&series=gwp2_n_1) and <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

## Peace and Conflict

The potential of war and conflict is massive, especially with the struggle for resources needed by the fast-growing population. Children's survival and development are the most affected during and post conflict situations. Children living in conflict zones – such as in Papua in Indonesia, Rakhine States in Myanmar, Southern borders in Thailand, and Marawi in the Philippines – witness violence and experience grave violations of their rights.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, as identified by the child delegates consulted in developing CRC Asia's #SafeWeb4Kids campaign in 2016, children are at risk of being targeted as supporters or participants of violent extremism through social media and online means.<sup>21</sup>

Relevant to the discussions on conflict and peace is the issue on the effects of substance abuse on children – in both cases when children are surrounded by adults using drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes, or when children themselves use these substances. In the Philippines, the government's "war on drugs" starting in 2016 led to the deaths and injuries of children, which were shrugged off as "collateral damage."<sup>22</sup> In Cambodia and Thailand, the 2018 children's consultations by CRC Asia member organizations also identified substance abuse as a concern for the children. In 2017, the child delegates of the *7<sup>th</sup> High-Level Cross-Regional Roundtable on Violence against Children* raised the need for government actions to support children affected by drugs.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, when CRC Asia was developing the child-friendly version of the ASEAN Declaration on EAW and EVAC in 2016, the consulted children mentioned that the list of children in vulnerable situations should also include children in gangs and children who are exposed to drug addiction, alcoholism, and cigarette use.<sup>24</sup>

## Gender

Gender inequality and discrimination still exist in Asia and similar to the participation in public space, the laws and policies on girls' rights are reflected on the laws and policies on women. According to the 2018 World Bank Database on Women in Business and Law,<sup>25</sup> only four out of 18 countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia have legislation that upholds equal remuneration for work of equal value done by male and female workers; eleven out of these 18 countries have laws providing equal rights between sons and daughters to inherit assets from parents; eight countries have legislation explicitly criminalizing marital rape; 17 countries have legislation specifically addressing sexual violence; and 14 countries prohibiting or invalidating child marriage.

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<sup>20</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict issued on 16 May 2018

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.crcasia.org/campaigns/safeweb4kids/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.crcasia.org/tag/war-on-drugs/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.crcasia.org/the-voices-of-children-at-the-7th-high-level-cross-regional-roundtable-on-vac/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.crcasia.org/1046-2/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://wbl.worldbank.org/>

The prevalence of child marriage is entrenched in gender inequality. UNICEF (2019) reported that girls are more likely to marry early than boys, which means that there is less opportunities for girls in improving their education, health, and social development. UNICEF (2019) and the Australian Government (2018) reported that 30% of women in South Asia and 18% of women in East Asia aged 20-24 years old reported being married before the age of 18. The Australian Government (2018) also reported that women aged 15 to 19 years old in Asia are at highest risk of experiencing physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner. Due to traditional practices, domestic violence or intimate partner violence is accepted and kept from public discussions.

During the 7<sup>th</sup> *High-Level Cross-Regional Roundtable on Violence against Children*, the children recommended adding sexuality education in the school curriculum as an action to address sexual violence.<sup>26</sup> Not to be confused with sex education, sexuality education is about “human sexuality, including intimate relationships, human sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, sexually transmitted infections, sexual activity, sexual orientation, gender identity, abstinence, contraception, and reproductive rights and responsibilities.”<sup>27</sup> Following up on this children’s recommendation to ASEAN, however, would require carefully crafted strategies, especially since ASEAN Member States have different views regarding “sexual and reproductive health” and in recognizing the LGBT community. In addition to a comprehensive sexuality education, there should also be program for children who have committed offenses related to sexual violence.

Gender inequality is visible in the situation of adolescent girls and boys in early pregnancy. Globally, approximately 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 years give birth each year in developing regions,<sup>28</sup> and because of social and cultural traditions, girls are expected to take care of the child. One way to address this is to have comprehensive, adolescent-friendly, and rights-based approach to providing care for pregnant adolescents. Although preventive measures should always be a priority, measures that respond to pregnant adolescents should also be given attention, and these measures should involve the adolescent fathers. Both adolescent girls and boys entering parenthood should be given support to their emerging autonomy; undergo screening for risk behaviors; have a place to go for help wherein confidentiality is assured; develop decision-making skills; and be guided in promoting self-efficacy.<sup>29</sup> In the general sense, efforts towards empowerment of girls should include teaching boys about their roles on achieving gender equality.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.crcasia.org/the-voices-of-children-at-the-7th-high-level-cross-regional-roundtable-on-vac/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/2/e20161348>

<sup>28</sup> UNFPA. *Girlhood, not motherhood: Preventing adolescent pregnancy*. New York: UNFPA; 2015.

<sup>29</sup> From the presentation of Llanto and Silvestre (2017) *Motherhood in childhood*. Presented during the Asia-Pacific Partnership Meeting of Child Rights Coalitions and Networks in July 2017, Bangkok, Thailand.

In some areas boys also experience gender inequality. For instance, in the Philippines, the punishment for rape of boys is lower than the punishment of girls.<sup>30</sup> The most recent national baseline study also shows that the percentage of boys (65.2%) who reported experiencing sexual violence is higher than girls (60.4%).<sup>31</sup>

### Disability and Mental Health

Children with disabilities face physical, attitudinal, policy and, institutional barriers that decrease the opportunities for them to be involved in decision-making processes.<sup>32</sup> In addition, children with disabilities are almost four times more likely to experience violence than other children.<sup>33</sup>

In 2017, the World Health Organization released the publication *Mental Health Status of Adolescents in South-East Asia: Evidence for Action* that calls for actions promoting the mental health and well-being of adolescents.<sup>34</sup> Citing Kieling, Baker-Henningham et al. (2011), the report said that 10-20% of children and adolescents worldwide, accounting for 15-30% of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) lost during the first three decades of life, are affected by mental health problems. However, mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression that emerge in late childhood or early adolescence are usually undiagnosed and untreated in developing countries not only because of the limited access to psychological and psychiatric services, but also because of substantial social stigma on mental health issues.<sup>35</sup>

### Violence against Children

In CRC Asia's survey with children, children identified violence as one of their top concerns.<sup>36</sup> Children in the 7<sup>th</sup> *High-Level Cross-Regional Roundtable on Violence against Children* also shared experiencing and witnessing violence against children at home, in schools, in places of work, in the community, in alternative care and justice system, and the internet.<sup>37</sup>

In Southeast Asia, no country has fully prohibited physical and humiliating punishment in all settings.<sup>38</sup> The Philippines have prohibited the use of corporal

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<sup>30</sup> <https://childrightsnetwork.ph/advocacies/end-child-rape/#>

<sup>31</sup> Council for the Welfare of Children and UNICEF Philippines. 2016. National Baseline Study on Violence against Children (NBSVAC): Philippines (Executive Summary). Retrieved from: [https://www.unicef.org/philippines/PHL\\_NBSVAC\\_Results\\_ES.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/philippines/PHL_NBSVAC_Results_ES.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Plan International. (2014). Guidelines for consulting with children & young people with disabilities

<sup>33</sup> SRSG Annual Report to the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/40/50, January 2019, Section VI, pp. 16-19 "Leaving no child behind – protecting children with disabilities from violence". [<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/50>]

<sup>34</sup> World Health Organization. Regional Office for South-East Asia. (2017). Mental health status of adolescents in South-East Asia: evidence for action. World Health Organization. Regional Office for South-East Asia.

<http://www.who.int/iris/handle/10665/254982>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See Annex 4. Children's Inputs to CRCA Strategic Plan 2019

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.crcasia.org/the-voices-of-children-at-the-7th-high-level-cross-regional-roundtable-on-vac/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.crcasia.org/booklet-violence-of-children-in-southeast-asia/>

punishment in schools, daycare, alternative care, and penal system, but it is still accepted as a form of “disciplining” children at home. Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam have fully prohibited physical and humiliating punishment in schools and penal system, but it is still accepted in day cares, alternative cares, and at home.

The prevalence of violence against children are brought about by harmful practices and beliefs, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage; discrimination on the basis of gender, age, and disability; and lack of child participation in addressing VAC.

### Climate crisis and emergencies

Children will suffer the brunt of climate emergency because they are more vulnerable to vector-borne diseases, at higher risk of undernutrition and diseases, and will feel the impacts of climate change longer than the adults.<sup>39</sup> Living in the most disaster-prone region in the world, children in Asia-Pacific are vulnerable to frequent and unpredictable calamities.<sup>40</sup> The East Asia and the Pacific region is also facing the risk of sea-level rise, requiring adaptive measures such as building sea walls and planting mangroves, effective management of impacted ecosystems, coastal assets, and communities, and resilience planning.<sup>41</sup>

Aware of these threats, children have taken action in addressing the climate emergency and being proactive in disaster risk reduction. The world witnessed child-led actions and movements to influence government agenda on climate change – from teenagers starting a campaign against single-use plastics, to girls being involved in strengthening resilience against floods, to students taking part in the worldwide School Strike for Climate. As children take part in these climate actions, though, they are exposed to threats and punishment from schools and government.<sup>42</sup>

Addressing the climate crisis is more than an environmental issue. Climate action is related to social justice because the consequences are social, economic and humanitarian.<sup>43</sup> During emergency situations and fragile contexts, girls may be especially vulnerable.<sup>44</sup> Children in marginalized groups, such as children with disabilities, children without parental care, and children living in poverty, become more vulnerable during emergency situations.

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<sup>39</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Unless\\_we\\_act\\_now\\_The\\_impact\\_of\\_climate\\_change\\_on\\_children.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Unless_we_act_now_The_impact_of_climate_change_on_children.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> UNESCAP (2015). *Disasters in Asia and the Pacific: 2015 Year in review*. Available at [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2015\\_Year%20in%20Review\\_final\\_PDF\\_1.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2015_Year%20in%20Review_final_PDF_1.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/risk-of-sea-level-rise-high-stakes-for-east-asia-pacific-region-countries>

<sup>42</sup> <https://home.crin.org/students-have-a-right-to-protest-schools-must-respect-it> and <https://zh-hk.facebook.com/HKCCR/posts/2109759852441842>

<sup>43</sup> <https://genderandenvironment.org/resource/climate-change-social-justice/>

<sup>44</sup> Plan (2011) *Weathering the Storm: Adolescent Girls and Climate Change Plan*, UK



## Urbanization

The *2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects* prepared by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) says that more than half of the world's population is living in urban areas, and an additional 2.5 billion people are expected to live in urban areas by 2050 with 90% of this increase taking place in Asia and Africa.<sup>45</sup> According to UNICEF, of the four billion people in urban areas today, around one-third are children and if enhanced planning and sound investments are not done, urban poverty is expected to get worse.<sup>46</sup> Armed conflicts, earthquakes, and occurrence of communicable diseases in densely populated areas also imply high number of deaths and injuries.<sup>47</sup>

## OUR VISION

Our purpose of existing as a coalition is to achieve this vision of “All children living in dignity by fully enjoying and exercising their rights.” Using the UN CRC and its Optional Protocols as our blueprint, this is the ambition that brings us together despite the geographical distance or differences in organizational structures and design.

## OUR TARGETS

We will focus on the following programs in which we can bring significant contributions and added-value to contribute to the advancement of the rights of the child in the region.

\*Please refer to Annex 1 for more detailed presentation of our program objectives, indicators, milestones, and activities.

### Child Rights Governance Program

#### **CSO space in child rights monitoring**

Over the course of five years, we will increase the **networking and collaboration** of child rights organizations to contribute to monitor the commitments on children's rights by providing and utilizing **civil society space** at the national, regional, and international levels. We will strengthen the **organizational capacity** of civil society organizations to use the inclusion and gender lens in monitoring children's rights.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.unicef-emergencies.com/downloads/eresource/docs/urban/02.01-Strategic%20Note%20on%20UNICEF's%20Work%20for%20Children%20in%20Urban%20Settings.%2022%20May%202017.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

### ***CSO and child participation in public budgeting for children's rights***

We will continue our efforts to improve public budgeting for the realization of children's rights by improving the **understanding and capacity** of child rights organizations to participate in the budgeting process at the national/local level, particularly on upholding the principles of equity and transparency. At the same time, we will strive to **influence** ASEAN to involve civil society in its project on public budgeting, which could have a long-term and local impact.

### **Child Protection Program**

#### ***Addressing the underlying causes of violence against children***

In an effort to have more transformative results, we will focus on scaling up child protection by advocating for policies, programs, and mechanisms that address the underlying causes of violence against children, including discrimination on the basis of gender, ability, and age. We will do this by starting the discussion in ASEAN on considering **sexuality education** in schools, aware of the possible reservations on the term "sexuality" or "reproductive health"; promoting rights-based approach to **adolescent girls and boys in early pregnancy/ parenthood**; and capacitating child rights organizations to address the issues of children exposed to **substance abuse** and child rights issues related to **mental health and disability**, as well as to advocate on ending **female genital mutilation**, raise the **minimum age of marriage** for girls and boys, and eliminate **physical and humiliating punishment**.

#### ***Child protection in rapidly changing settings***

We will advocate for the implementation of child participation in addressing child protection issues in constantly changing settings. We will work with online media/technology companies in involving children to identify issues and recommendations in the **digital environment**, including the risk of recruitment to **violent extremism or armed conflict**. We will strengthen the CSOs capacity to enhance the participation of poor children living in **urban settings**. We will push ASEAN to develop/consolidate child-centered and child-participated strategies in programs for **emergency situations**. We will strengthen the adult support to ensure the protection of children implementing child-led advocacies on **climate action**.

## Child Participation Program

We will create or strengthen platforms and support for children to voice out and claim their rights on issues that affect them by pushing for or influencing the actions or decisions of **regional intergovernmental** bodies such as ASEAN and SAARC to advance child participation; creating/strengthening the **complaints mechanisms for children** at the national, regional, and international levels; **capacitating** child rights organizations and other stakeholders working directly with children on applying child participation in their work; creating **platforms for children human rights defenders** and provided **support to child-led campaigns** even on issues not directly identified in CRC Asia's strategic plan; and providing **child-friendly materials** of international, regional, and national documents are produced to support children in their participation to decision-making processes.

## Cross-Cutting Themes

In implementing our programs, the following themes will always be taken into account:

1. Child Participation
2. Non-Discrimination, especially in terms of gender, disability, and race/nationality

## MAKING IT HAPPEN

### 1. Enabling environment for civil society and children to participate

An open civic space is crucial in the achievement of our targets. In the next five years, we will contribute having an enabling environment for civil society organizations and child-led groups by building their capacities to participate in decision-making processes, by facilitating the creation and strengthening of partnerships, and by creating opportunities at the regional level to influence the civil society space and child participation at the global and local levels.

### 2. Addressing discrimination on the basis of gender, ability, and age

Although this strategy may be more challenging and may take longer to see actual results on the ground, we will address the underlying causes that hinder the achievement of our targets. We will propose solutions and undertake actions that are transformative for girls, boys, and other children who identify themselves as members of the LGBT community. We will continue being a strong advocate for child participation, underscoring that a

young age is not a valid reason to be excluded from decision-making processes. We will highlight the evolving capacities of children and adolescents in our advocacy work. We will promote discussions and advocacies on mental health problems that cause disability.

### 3. Broadening and deepening partnerships within civil society and with children

We will use our position as a regional organization to link the local to global, and bridge the partnerships between CSOs and child-led organizations. We will develop and strengthen our partnerships with other child rights organizations that have the expertise we do not possess yet, such as on gender, disability, climate action, and conflicts. We will explore and strengthen partnerships with women's groups, medical professionals, groups working with indigenous communities, groups working in disaster risk reduction, and other organizations of professionals and actors working directly with children. (See our identified *Possible Partners* on the next page).

### 4. Improving the knowledge and skills of civil society to engage

In the next five years, our capacity building activities will focus on organizational development and strengthening partnerships and alliances. We will also focus on improving the knowledge and skills of civil society organizations, including ourselves, on using the inclusion and gender lens in every aspect of our work. We will contribute to making sure that CSOs in Asia are updated on emerging child rights issues and have the capacity to address these issues. Based on the needs, we will provide technical support to national-level capacity building efforts, utilizing CRC Asia's diverse capacities and perspectives.

### 5. Creating and utilizing opportunities for civil society and child participation

We will use and assist other CSOs in utilizing the existing civic space in the human rights treaty bodies and Special Procedures. By being a credible and reliable child rights organization in the region, we will strive to show the importance and benefits of collaborations between civil society and regional intergovernmental bodies. We will also create platforms that facilitate engagements between and among stakeholders, including civil society, child-led organizations, and decision-makers. While doing so, we will push for civil society space that does not discriminate on the basis of gender, ability, and age. We will ensure that the principle of child participation is upheld, even in settings that undergo rapid changes and developments.

## 6. Empowering marginalized girls, boys, and other children by improving their knowledge and skills to participate

Listening to the voices of children, especially those who are marginalized, is another crucial factor to achieve our targets. As such, we will help children and child-led groups to improve their knowledge and skills on participate in decision-making process. We will support them in their campaigns, ideally even on issues that are not included in this strategic plan. We will provide them access to child-friendly information that will help them form their own thoughts and opinions.

## OUR GEOGRAPHICAL AREA AND IMPACT GROUPS

Our work and partnerships should be guided by the following Core Values:

1. Best Interest of the Child
2. Child Participation
3. Non-discrimination
4. Right to Life, Survival, and Development
5. Accountability
6. Integrity
7. Transparency
8. Efficiency
9. Non-Violence
10. Mutual Respect

Our main beneficiaries are our member organizations and the children they are supporting. Our efforts will also impact civil society organizations working for child rights and human rights, decision-makers, and other stakeholders working for and with children.

Our main impact will be in Asia, taking advantage of our established network in the Southeast sub-region, our expanding membership base in the East, and our initial partners in the South. We will strive to extend our presence in other countries or sub-regions in Asia.